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ABSTRACT

Designed to renew the relationship between the Canadian government and the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, this action plan contains a statement of reconciliation, a statement of renewal, and four key objectives for action. First, renewing partnerships includes community-based healing to address the negative effects of the residential schools system, a focus on the historical federal-Aboriginal treaty relationship, recognition of the importance of Aboriginal participation in program design and delivery, restructuring of federal institutions, support for an Aboriginal languages program, a public education campaign to increase understanding of Aboriginal issues, and a more coordinated approach to helping urban Aboriginal people. Second, strengthening Aboriginal governance involves recognizing existing Aboriginal governments and the right to self-government, building capacity for governance through professional development, affirming and commemorating treaties, cost-sharing on Metis enumeration, and facilitating participation of women in self-government. Third, developing a new fiscal relationship with Aboriginal governments and institutions includes improved revenue generating and data collection mechanisms, strong accountability, and training. Fourth, supporting strong communities includes increasing housing, water, sewer, health, youth, and police services; reforming education in partnership with First Nations; increasing Aboriginal business access to capital and markets; and reducing Aboriginal welfare dependence. A final section on Northern initiatives explains why the environment for Aboriginal policy in the North is different than in southern Canada and how the four objectives of the action plan are expected to be implemented there. (TD)

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# Gathering Strength

## Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan

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## Gathering Strength -- Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan

### Foreword

Gathering Strength is an action plan designed to renew the relationship with the Aboriginal people of Canada. This plan builds on the principles of mutual respect, mutual recognition, mutual responsibility and sharing which were identified in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. That report has served as a catalyst and an inspiration for the federal government's decision to set a new course in its policies for Aboriginal people.

Gathering Strength looks both to the past and the future. It begins with a Statement of Reconciliation that acknowledges the mistakes and injustices of the past; moves to a Statement of Renewal that expresses a vision of a shared future for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; and outlines four key objectives for action to begin now:

- Renewing the Partnerships speaks to bringing about meaningful and lasting change in our relationships with Aboriginal people;
- Strengthening Aboriginal Governance is about supporting Aboriginal people in their efforts to

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create effective and accountable governments, affirming treaty relationships, and negotiating fair solutions to Aboriginal land claims;
- Developing a New Fiscal Relationship means arriving at financial arrangements with Aboriginal governments and organizations which are stable, predictable, and accountable and will help foster self-reliance; and
- Supporting Strong Communities, People and Economies focusses on improving health and public safety, investing in people, and strengthening Aboriginal economic development.

A separate section in Gathering Strength focusses on how these objectives can be achieved in the unique circumstances of Canada's northern territories.

This action plan is best described as a framework for new partnerships with First Nations, Inuit, Métis and Non-Status Indians. It is a first step toward more effective working relationships between the Government of Canada and Aboriginal people. We want to work with them to develop agendas that respond to their unique needs and circumstances. Work is already advanced on this front.

The partnerships envisaged in this action plan are broadly based, and should include Aboriginal people and organizations, the Government of Canada, other levels of government, the private sector -- indeed, all Canadians. Working together, we can address the needs of Aboriginal people and communities. Working together, we can make the promise of a renewed partnership a reality.

## Statement of Reconciliation

### Learning from the Past

As Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians seek to move forward together in a process of renewal, it is essential that we deal with the legacies of the past affecting the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including the First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Our purpose is not to rewrite history but, rather, to learn from our past and to find ways to deal with the negative impacts that certain historical decisions continue to have in our society today.

The ancestors of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples lived on this continent long before explorers from other continents first came to North America. For thousands of years before this country was founded, they enjoyed their own forms of government. Diverse, vibrant Aboriginal nations had ways of life rooted in fundamental values concerning their relationships to the Creator, the environment, and each other, in the role of Elders as the living memory of their ancestors, and in their responsibilities as custodians of the lands, waters and resources of their homelands.

The assistance and spiritual values of the Aboriginal peoples who welcomed the newcomers to this continent too often have been forgotten. The contributions made by all Aboriginal peoples to Canada's development, and the contributions that they continue to make to our society today, have not been properly acknowledged. The Government of Canada today, on behalf of all Canadians, acknowledges those contributions.

Sadly, our history with respect to the treatment of Aboriginal people is not something in which we can take pride. Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of Aboriginal culture and values. As a country, we are burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of Aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures, and outlawing spiritual practices. We must recognize the impact of these actions on the once self-sustaining nations that were disaggregated, disrupted, limited or even destroyed by the dispossession of traditional territory, by the relocation of Aboriginal people, and by some provisions of the Indian Act. We must acknowledge that the result of these actions was the erosion of the political, economic and social systems of Aboriginal people and nations.

Against the backdrop of these historical legacies, it is a remarkable tribute to the strength and endurance of Aboriginal people that they have maintained their historic diversity and identity. The Government of Canada today formally expresses to all Aboriginal people in Canada our profound regret for past actions of the federal government which have contributed to these difficult pages in the history of our relationship together.

One aspect of our relationship with Aboriginal people over this period that requires particular attention is the Residential School system. This system separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their own languages and from learning about their heritage and cultures. In the worst cases, it left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in Aboriginal communities to this day. Tragically, some children were the victims of physical and sexual abuse.

The Government of Canada acknowledges the role it played in the development and administration of these schools. Particularly to those individuals who experienced the tragedy of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools, and who have carried this burden believing that in some way they must be responsible, we wish to emphasize that what you experienced was not your fault and should never have happened. To those of you who suffered this tragedy at residential schools, we are deeply sorry.

In dealing with the legacies of the Residential School system, the Government of Canada proposes to work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, the Churches and other interested parties to resolve the longstanding issues that must be addressed. We need to work together on a healing strategy to assist individuals and communities in dealing with the consequences of this sad era of our history.

No attempt at reconciliation with Aboriginal people can be complete without reference to the sad events culminating in the death of Métis leader Louis Riel. These events cannot be undone; however, we can and will continue to look for ways of affirming the contributions of Métis people in Canada and of reflecting Louis Riel's proper place in Canada's history.

Reconciliation is an ongoing process. In renewing our partnership, we must ensure that the mistakes which marked our past relationship are not repeated. The Government of Canada recognizes that policies that sought to assimilate Aboriginal people, women and men, were not the way to build a strong country. We must instead continue to find ways in which Aboriginal people can participate fully in the economic, political, cultural and social life of Canada in a manner which preserves and enhances the collective identities of Aboriginal communities, and allows them to evolve and flourish in the future. Working together to achieve our shared goals will benefit all Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.



## Statement of Renewal

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that fundamental change is needed in the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. The Royal Commission's vision included rebuilding Aboriginal nationhood; supporting effective and accountable Aboriginal governments; establishing government-to-government relationships between Canada and Aboriginal nations; and taking practical steps to improve the living conditions of Aboriginal people. It called for a partnership based on the four principles of mutual respect andrecognition, responsibility and sharing.

The Government of Canada agrees with the Commission's conclusion that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people must work together, using a non-adversarial approach, to shape a new vision of their relationship and to make that vision a reality. In that spirit, Canada is undertaking to build a renewed partnership with Aboriginal people and governments.

Canada's vision of partnership means celebrating our diversity while sharing common goals. It means developing effective working relationships with Aboriginal organizations and communities. Above all, it means all levels of government, the private sector, and individuals working together with Aboriginal

people on practical solutions to address their needs. Our common aim should be to help strengthen Aboriginal communities and economies, and to overcome the obstacles that have slowed progress in the past.

The federal government recognizes, as did the Commission, that meaningful and lasting change will require many years to implement. The renewal of Canada's relationship with Aboriginal people must begin now.

The government has adopted four closely linked objectives that will guide its commitment to Aboriginal people.

We begin with a commitment to Renewing the Partnerships. Canada acknowledges errors in its past relationship with Aboriginal people and the need for healing to occur. The Government of Canada will work together with Aboriginal people and organizations, provincial and territorial governments, and other partners to develop solutions for the future.

Moving to new solutions means ensuring that the authority, accountability and responsibility of each of the parties are established. It means recognizing traditional customs, including their role in governance; celebrating Aboriginal languages, heritage, and culture; assisting to build the capacity of Aboriginal institutions to handle new responsibil-ities; and working to establish mechanisms to recognize sustainable and accountable Aboriginal governments and institutions.

The government will work with Aboriginal people to help achieve the objective of Strengthening Aboriginal Governance, building on treaty relationships where appropriate. This means developing practical arrangements for self-government that are effective, legitimate and accountable; that have the strength to build opportunity and self-reliance; and that can work in a co-ordinated manner with other governments. It also means extending co-management arrangements, negotiating First Nations acquisition of land and resources through claims processes, and taking steps to improve the claims process.

Helping Aboriginal governments and institutions become effective will require financial arrangements that are more stable, predictable, and accountable and that encourage Aboriginal governments to develop their own sources of revenues. To that end, the government will work with Aboriginal partners and with provincial and territorial governments towards the goal of Developing a New Fiscal Relationship.

A renewed partnership will provide the base for working together with Aboriginal people in Supporting Strong Communities, People and Economies, so that the promise of a brighter future turns into a reality. The federal government is committed to addressing social change for Aboriginal people by focussing on improving health and public safety, investing in people, and strengthening economic development. These initiatives will be developed in partnership with Aboriginal people, their communities and governments. All partners have a role in turning these goals into realities.

While it has a unique relationship with Inuit and First Nations communities, Canada recognizes that Métis, off-reserve and urban Aboriginal people face significant and growing challenges. As a result, many of the initiatives for renewal apply to all Aboriginal people without regard to their status or where they live. Specific initiatives have also been designed to meet the unique needs of Métis, off-reserve and urban Aboriginal people. Consistent with the government's commitment to a renewed relationship, these initiatives will be developed in partnership with the Aboriginal people and communities affected, as well as provincial and territorial governments.

Conditions for creating a renewed relationship with Aboriginal people in the North differ from those in the rest of Canada. Significant progress has already been made on land claims and new forms of governance, including the creation of the new territory of Nunavut.

Working with Aboriginal people and territorial governments to develop governance structures and strengthen communities in the North will be a priority. The federal government is committed to ensuring that Aboriginal people share in the resource-based opportunities now emerging in the North, while

protecting the fragile northern environment.

In Gathering Strength, the federal government has set out the details of the agenda for renewal which it intends to implement in partnership with Aboriginal people. Some of these new approaches have already begun. Others will be added to this framework over time.

Many more practical steps are needed to make this a reality. It will be a long journey, but it is one that offers hope and opportunity for all who are involved, and for Canada as a whole.



## Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan

### I: Renewing the Partnerships

An important objective for the Government of Canada during its last mandate was to build a partnership with Aboriginal people, other levels of government and the private sector.

This approach yielded a number of important and tangible results, such as the government's new Aboriginal housing and procurement policies, the Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI) in New Brunswick and the Aboriginal Single Window Initiative in Winnipeg. However, Aboriginal people continue to fare worse than non-Aboriginal people in terms of virtually all social and economic indicators. This means that we must all do more.

A key theme in the Royal Commission's report is the need for restructuring the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. This is why a partnership that clearly defines the authority, accountability and responsibility of each of the parties is the foundation of Gathering Strength.

#### Elements of a Renewed Partnership

#### Reconciliation

As the Royal Commission states in its final report, before the renewal of the relationship can begin, "a great cleansing of the wounds of the past must take place." It is for this reason that Gathering Strength begins with a Statement of Reconciliation in which the Government of Canada formally acknowledges and expresses regret for the historic injustices experienced by Aboriginal people.

#### Healing

Any attempt at reconciliation would be incomplete without reference to Residential Schools, and dedicated action in support of those Aboriginal people who tragically suffered abuse as children while in these institutions. Concerted efforts are required to help Aboriginal individuals, families and communities in the healing process. In the Statement of Reconciliation, the Government of Canada has said to the victims of sexual and physical abuse that we are deeply sorry. The Government of Canada is also committed to assisting in community healing to address the profound impacts of abuse at Residential Schools. Healing initiatives will be designed in partnership with the Aboriginal leadership and victims groups, and will be delivered in the broadest possible fashion to all Aboriginal people, including Métis and off-reserve individuals and communities that have been impacted by the residential school system.

In developing its Aboriginal Action Plan, the Government of Canada sincerely hopes and believes that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can develop a common vision for the future. This vision must include the means for Aboriginal people to participate fully in the economic, political, cultural and social life of Canada in a manner which preserves and enhances the collective identities of their communities, and allows them to build for a better future. This can and will be achieved as all parties accept, in a spirit of mutual respect and mutual responsibility, the challenge of strengthening the partnership between

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

**A Treaty Relationship**

A vision for the future should build on recognition of the rights of Aboriginal people and on the treaty relationship. Beginning almost 300 years ago, treaties were signed between the British Crown and many First Nations living in what was to become Canada. These treaties between the Crown and First Nations are basic building blocks in the creation of our country.

For most First Nations, the historical treaties are sacred. They impose serious mutual obligations and go to the heart of how the parties wanted to live together. The federal government believes that treaties -- both historical and modern -- and the relationship they represent provide a basis for developing a strengthened and forward-looking partnership with Aboriginal people.

**Federal-Provincial-Territorial-Aboriginal Partnership and Co-ordination**

The Government of Canada intends to work with other levels of government to find practical solutions to the problems facing Aboriginal people, both nationally and on a province-by-province basis. The Government of Canada therefore invites other governments to give priority to the establishment and strengthening of forums that will identify areas for immediate co-operation and create the basis for more substantial change over the longer term.

The distribution of responsibilities and powers in our federation means that shared objectives for addressing Aboriginal issues can only be achieved if all levels of government work co-operatively with each other and with Aboriginal people. We need to move beyond debate and disagreements over jurisdictions and responsibilities and employ alternative approaches that support a partnership.

There are already examples of how governments and Aboriginal people can act co-operatively to address Aboriginal issues. These examples include the British Columbia Treaty Process, the Canada-Saskatchewan common table with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), and the Joint Economic Development Initiative in New Brunswick. Similarly, tripartite self-government processes exist in most provinces to address the self-government aspirations of Métis and other off-reserve Aboriginal people. We can build on these approaches.

**Partners in Design, Development and Delivery**

Another key element of a renewed partnership is the recognition that Aboriginal people must participate fully in the design and delivery of programs affecting their lives and communities. The federal government will continue to work with Aboriginal communities and organizations to develop a common vision of the future on priorities for action. The federal government and Aboriginal governments and institutions will also work with other levels of government, the private and non-profit sectors and other partners, as appropriate, to design and implement initiatives at both the national and regional levels.

The federal government is also making a concerted effort in developing new and renewed federal initiatives to consider the needs of Aboriginal people, both on and off reserves, in areas such as employment and training, economic development, health, and youth and children's programs.

The Government of Canada will also consider increased support for Aboriginal representative organizations, both on and off reserves, in order to assist these organizations to more effectively represent their members.

**Restructuring Federal Institutions**

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples made a number of suggestions for restructuring federal institutions. The Government of Canada agrees with the underlying view that policy development and implementation, and the delivery of programs and services should reflect the new relationship. We are open to further discussions on the departmental and institutional arrangements that could improve

existing systems.

**Language, Heritage and Culture**

Respect and support for Aboriginal language, heritage and culture is an important element of a renewed partnership. The Government of Canada will work to help preserve Aboriginal languages, both as a link to our collective past and as a promise for the future of Aboriginal people. We will continue to work with Aboriginal people to establish programs to preserve, protect, and teach Aboriginal languages, and to ensure that these languages are kept alive for future generations.

**Public Education**

Partners need to understand one another. To that end, Aboriginal people and other stakeholders will be asked to join in a public education campaign that builds on existing initiatives, programs and events. This initiative will reach out to all corners of Canada, including young Canadians, mainstream and corporate Canada, and influential leaders and organizations, in order to build more balanced, realistic and informed perspectives with respect to Aboriginal people, their cultures and their present and future needs.

**Urban Issues**

The federal government recognizes the need to respond to the serious socio-economic conditions that many urban Aboriginal people are facing. It also recognizes that the only way to effectively respond to these problems is to involve all stakeholders. That is why the federal government has recently been making greater efforts to strengthen partnerships with provincial governments and Aboriginal groups to develop practical approaches for improving the delivery of programs and services to urban Aboriginal people. An example of this new approach is the recent establishment of an Aboriginal Single Window Initiative in Winnipeg, in conjunction with the Province of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg. The Single Window provides improved access to, and information on, government programs and services of interest to Aboriginal people, and helps to form a climate of co-operation and information sharing between governments. The federal government is committed to working with stakeholders to develop other joint ventures of this nature.

Another important measure is the recent publication of the Guide to Federal Initiatives for Urban Aboriginal People, which provides information on more than 80 federal initiatives of interest to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, businesses, and organizations located in urban centres.

**International Partnerships**

Canada is working at the forefront of many international issues that affect indigenous peoples. An example is its work at the United Nations on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Canada is committed to achieving a declaration that reflects the unique place of indigenous peoples in the world and applies universally; that promotes and protects indigenous rights; that works against discrimination; and that provides clear guidance for developing effective and harmonious relationships between indigenous peoples and the states in which they live. Other examples include partnerships to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity and efforts to promote international trade opportunities for indigenous peoples' products and handicrafts.

Partnership within Canada with indigenous peoples is an important aspect of Canada's northern foreign policy. The federal government is also committed to the participation of northern indigenous peoples in formulating and implementing Canada's circumpolar objectives.

At the circumpolar level, this partnership has been realized by according indigenous peoples the status of permanent participants within the Arctic Council, a new international forum of eight Arctic countries formed to promote co-operation and concerted action on issues such as sustainable development and environmental protection. They will oversee and co-ordinate those programs established under the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy.

## II: Strengthening Aboriginal Governance

The Royal Commission took the view that the right of self-government is vested in Aboriginal nations and noted that the exercise of extensive jurisdictions by local communities may not always lead to effective or sustainable governments in the long term. The federal government supports the concept of self-government being exercised by Aboriginal nations or other larger groupings of Aboriginal people. It recognizes the need to work closely with Aboriginal people, institutions and organizations on initiatives that move in this direction and to ensure that the perspectives of Aboriginal women are considered in these discussions.

Aboriginal people recognize the need for strong, accountable and sustainable governments and institutions. This means ensuring that Aboriginal governments and institutions have the authority, accountability mechanisms and legitimacy to retain the confidence and support of their constituents and of other governments and institutions, to govern effectively. The Government of Canada will work closely with Aboriginal people, and provincial and territorial governments, where appropriate, to turn this political ideal into a practical reality.

### Recognizing the Inherent Right of Self-Government

The Government of Canada recognizes that Aboriginal people maintained self-sufficient governments with sustainable economies, distinctive languages, powerful spirituality, and rich, diverse cultures on this continent for thousands of years. Consistent with recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the federal government has recognized the inherent right of self-government for Aboriginal people as an existing Aboriginal right within section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

Today, approximately 80 tables to negotiate self-government arrangements have been established that bring First Nations and Inuit communities together with the federal government, provinces and territories.

Federal departments continue to devolve program responsibility and resources to Aboriginal organizations. More than 80 percent of the programs funded by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development are now being delivered by First Nation organizations or governments. In April 1996, the administration and funding of cultural education centres was transferred to First Nations control, and management of the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Program was devolved to the National Association of Friendship Centres. Responsibility for administering training supports has been devolved through regional bilateral agreements.

In the North, the federal and territorial governments and Aboriginal organizations are involved in a number of forums throughout the western Northwest Territories to discuss the ways of addressing Aboriginal self-government aspirations at the territorial, regional and community levels. Progress continues to be made on the establishment of the new territory of Nunavut, in which the self-government aspirations of Inuit of that region can be implemented through a new territorial government. In the Yukon, six self-government agreements have been signed and eight are being negotiated with Yukon First Nations, while discussions are under way with the Yukon Territorial Government and Yukon First Nations about the devolution of remaining provincial-type powers to the territory.

Self-government processes for Métis and off-reserve Aboriginal groups exist in most provinces. In these processes, the federal government is prepared to consider a variety of approaches to self-government, including self-government institutions, devolution of programs and services, and public government. All of these initiatives provide opportunities for significant Aboriginal input into program design and delivery, and should ultimately lead to direct control of programming by Aboriginal governments and institutions. New approaches to negotiations in the recent past have led to agreements on processes being reached with the land-based Métis Settlements General Council in Alberta and with the urban-based

Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg.

**Recognition of Aboriginal Governments**

The Government of Canada will consult with Aboriginal organizations and the provinces and territories on appropriate instruments to recognize Aboriginal governments and to provide a framework of principles to guide jurisdictional and inter-governmental relations. While the Royal Commission captured some of the key factors that must be considered, any initiative in this regard would be undertaken only in close consultation with Aboriginal and other partners.

**Métis Enumeration**

Enumeration is one of the building blocks of Métis and off-reserve self-government. The federal government and the Province of Saskatchewan cost-shared and participated in the development of an enumeration proposal with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan government has agreed to cost-share the enumeration, which should be completed by the spring of 1999. The Government of Canada will continue to pursue the issue of enumeration with other provinces where Métis and off-reserve groups identify this as a priority.

**Implementing Self-Government**

Strengthening Aboriginal governance means working with Aboriginal people, the provinces and territories, as well as other partners, to:

- Build governance capacities;
- Affirm the treaty relationship; and
- Continue to address claims in a fair and equitable manner.

**Building Governance Capacity**

As the Royal Commission noted, many Aboriginal groups and nations require support in order to assume the full range of responsibilities associated with governance, including legislative, executive, judicial and administrative functions. The federal government acknowledges that the existing federal policy and negotiation process, particularly in the area of capacity-building, can be improved. To address this, the Government of Canada intends to include a focus on capacity-building in the negotiating and implementing of self-government.

The government is also prepared to work with Aboriginal people to explore the possible establishment of governance resource centres. These centres could help Aboriginal people develop models of govern-ance, provide guidance on community consensus building and approaches to resolving disputes, and serve as a resource on best practices. It could assist Aboriginal people to identify the skills required. It could also play a role in supporting capacity development in the areas of administrative, financial and fiscal management.

Part of the vision for Nunavut includes a workforce that is representative of the population of Nunavut. As such, the parties to the Nunavut Political Accord have endorsed an initial target (by 1999) of 50 percent Inuit employment in Nunavut's public service, growing to a level of 85 percent over the longer term to correspond to the Inuit share of Nunavut's population.

Inuit face many challenges including low levels of education and training, as well as high drop-out rates. To address these issues, the parties have developed a unified strategy which addresses the need for human resource-development activities. This strategy is intended to fill the gaps not addressed by existing human resource planning and training programs, to ensure that more Inuit stay in school, and to prepare individuals for jobs in Nunavut.

**Aboriginal Women and Self-Government**

Capacity development also means ensuring that Aboriginal women are involved in the consultations and decision-making surrounding self-government initiatives. The federal government recognizes that Aboriginal women have traditionally played a significant role in the history of Aboriginal people and will strengthen their participation in self-government processes. This is particularly relevant for women at the community level. Consistent with the approach recommended by the Royal Commission, the federal government will consider additional funding for this purpose.

**Aboriginal Justice**

The Government of Canada will continue to discuss future directions in the justice area with Aboriginal people. We will work in partnership with Aboriginal people to increase their capacity to design, implement and manage community-based justice programs that conform to the basic standards of justice and are culturally relevant. We will also work with Aboriginal people to develop alternative approaches to the mainstream justice system, as well as dispute resolution bodies. Programs will require the inclusion of Aboriginal women at all stages.

**Professional Development in Land, Environment and Resource Management**

The Government of Canada, in partnership with First Nations, intends to develop and implement professional development strategies in the following key areas:

- Law-Making: a primary vehicle for legislative and executive capacity building to equip First Nations with trained personnel;
- Lands and Environmental Stewardship: initiatives will be supported to provide accredited professional development programs;
- Land and Resource Management: initiatives will support accelerated transfer to First Nations of land management, land registry and survey functions; and
- Community Support: specific capacity-development initiatives will be directed at promoting the informed consent of constituents in Aboriginal communities in order to help harmonize progress in governance with how community members understand the changes taking place.

These initiatives will strengthen First Nations capacity in key areas of governance and economic development.

**Affirming the Treaty Relationship**

Beginning in 1701, the British Crown entered into solemn treaties which were designed to foster the peaceful co-existence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Over several centuries and in different parts of the country, treaties were signed to accommodate different needs and conditions. The treaties between Aboriginal people and the Crown were key vehicles for arranging the basis of the relationship between them. The importance of the treaties is confirmed by the recognition of treaty rights, both historical and modern, and Aboriginal title in the Constitution Act, 1982.

The Government of Canada affirms that treaties, both historic and modern, will continue to be a key basis for the future relationship. The federal government remains willing to enter into a treaty relationship with groups which do not have treaties. This could take the form of a comprehensive claim agreement or a self-government agreement, so long as, where required, the relevant province or territory is party to the agreement. In this case, certain provisions in self-government agreements with First Nations, Inuit, Métis and off-reserve Aboriginal people could be constitutionally protected as treaty rights under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

In moving forward, the federal government believes that treaties, and the relationship they represent, can guide the way to a shared future. The continuing treaty relationship provides a context of mutual rights and responsibilities which will ensure that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can together enjoy the benefits of this great land.

**Commemorating the Historic Treaties**

The federal government will work in partnership with Treaty First Nations to facilitate the development of commemorative initiatives which honour and recognize our shared heritage and the historic relationship of the treaties.

**Exploratory Discussions with Treaty First Nations**

With respect to the historic treaties, First Nations representatives have often expressed frustration that governments have not sufficiently appreciated the importance of the treaties and the treaty relationship. First Nations commonly hold the view that many treaty promises have been broken over the years. The federal government recognizes that the treaty parties must deal with and honour the past relationship in order to move in partnership into the future.

To that end, the federal government is currently meeting with groups of Treaty First Nations to seek their views on how the historic treaties and treaty issues can be understood in contemporary terms, while fully recognizing their original spirit and intent. These discussions allow the parties to develop a common understanding of the issues and to consider ways to move into a relationship that is oriented to the future. The federal government intends to conduct additional exploratory discussions to respond to the request of Treaty First Nations for such a forum. Since many important treaty provisions are of direct interest to them, provincial governments also have an important role to play in this process.

**Bridging to Self-Government**

The Government of Canada is prepared to work in partnership with Treaty First Nations to achieve self-government within the context of the treaty relationship. For example, the Government of Canada, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and the Province of Saskatchewan are currently engaged in a process which links discussions on the historic treaties with governance, jurisdictional and fiscal negotiations. We are optimistic that this forward-looking and integrated approach will lead to strong governments. We are willing to establish similar integrated processes in consultation with other Treaty First Nations.

**Treaty Commissions**

Our experience has shown that an independent treaty commission can be of considerable help in educating the public, as well as in facilitating discussions of treaties, governance, jurisdictional and fiscal issues. An example is the Office of the Treaty Commissioner in Saskatchewan, which was established with the agreement of the federal government, Treaty First Nations and the provincial government. The federal government is prepared to consider the creation of additional treaty commissions to contribute to treaty renewal and the development of self-government where its partners agree that such an approach would be useful.

**Improving the Claims Process**

Over the last four years, the government has negotiated 61 specific and treaty land entitlement claims representing 417,000 hectares of land and $323 million in financial settlements. A $75-million, 440,000-hectare settlement of treaty land entitlement claims in Manitoba has been concluded.

Seven comprehensive claims settlements have been finalized since 1993, representing 66,000 square kilometres of land and approximately $230 million in financial settlements. With some 70 comprehensive land claims negotiations currently under way, the government is focussing its efforts on maintaining forward momentum.

**Comprehensive Claims and Certainty**

The Government of Canada is ready to discuss its current approach to comprehensive claims policy and process with Aboriginal, provincial and territorial partners in order to respond to concerns about the existing policy. The government will continue to work with its partners to explore possible methods that

will provide certainty for all parties in comprehensive claims settlements.

**Independent Claims Body**

The Government of Canada has been working with First Nations to make recommendations for an independent claims body to render binding decisions on the acceptance or rejection of claims. We are working in partnership with First Nation organizations to determine the extent of the body's authority to facilitate, arbitrate, or mediate disputes that may arise between Canada and the First Nations in the negotiation process.

**III: Developing A New Fiscal Relationship**

The Government of Canada will work in partnership with Aboriginal governments and organizations to develop a new fiscal relationship which provides more stable and predictable financing, is accountable, and which maximizes the internal generation of own-source revenue.

For First Nations, this means putting in place new fiscal relationships that will allow First Nations governments to exercise increased autonomy and greater self-reliance through the creation of expanded new transfer arrangements, First Nation fiscal authority, resource-revenue sharing and incentives for enhancing First Nations own-source revenue capacity.

**Funding Arrangements**

The federal government has recently improved its funding system by introducing new multi-year funding arrangements which give First Nations greater flexibility to design their own programs and allocate funds according to community priorities. In 1996-1997, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development transferred approximately $1 billion to almost 300 First Nations through multi-year agreements. Recent agreements have transferred the management of the programs for Aboriginal friendship centres and cultural education centres to their respective national organizations. Similar arrangements will be considered and implemented wherever possible and appropriate.

The government will continue to work in partnership with Aboriginal, provincial and territorial governments to further improve its fiscal relationship with Aboriginal governments and institutions. Future multi-year arrangements will establish clear funding formulas which will provide a more stable and predictable flow of revenue to facilitate program and financial planning. The government also intends to develop a process for renewing funding agreements with its Aboriginal partners. The overall aim will be to ensure that programs and services provided by Aboriginal governments and institutions are reasonably comparable to those provided in non-Aboriginal communities.

As part of the First Nations interest in improving financing arrangements, some progress has also been made in consolidating funding from different government departments into one funding arrangement. Health Canada and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development have initiated a pilot project designed to create a combined funding agreement for First Nations governments, while achieving economies in administration.

Joint fiscal-relations tables are being established in several provinces in order to facilitate the development of mechanisms for financial government-to-government transfer systems for First Nations governments. These transfer arrangements are to provide fair, stable and equitable transfers commensurate with responsibilities and circumstances. The fiscal relationship is also an issue in current self-government negotiations.

**Accountability**

As recognized government bodies, First Nations are adopting enhanced accountability mechanisms that

are comparable to those of other governments in Canada. Any new fiscal relationship must ensure that all Aboriginal governments and institutions are accountable to their members through frameworks built on the recognized principles of transparency, disclosure and redress common to governments in Canada. This includes the progressive implementation of government budgeting, internal controls, reporting and auditing standards.

A project has already been initiated with First Nations and the accounting industry to make information within First Nations financial statements relevant and comprehensible to community members and other users. Similarly, the accounting industry is becoming engaged in a process of considering the needs of First Nations within the accounting structures they develop.

Accountability to both community members and the Government of Canada will be enhanced through regular reporting of results against defined criteria and periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of financial arrangements with Aboriginal governments.

In addition to the new priorities for enhancing accountability, there remains the imperative to demonstrate the proper functioning of the existing framework. We will work together with our First Nations partners to implement increased measures to ensure proper and consistent application of existing accountability regimes.

**Own-Source Revenue**

Aboriginal governments want to increase their level of financial independence. The federal government supports this objective and will work with these governments to increase their capacity to generate their own revenue through economic development and internal sources. Models for applying own-source revenue as a contribution to the cost of government will be developed. Resource-revenue sharing with Aboriginal communities will also be encouraged through negotiation with provincial and territorial governments.

**Data Collection and Exchange**

Having relevant and meaningful data is critical to making a new fiscal relationship function effectively, particularly for a fiscal-transfer system. Reliable data are required to measure performance against program goals. To strengthen this capacity in First Nations communities, Statistics Canada plans to offer statistical training in data collection and analysis techniques to 30 to 40 Aboriginal people per year. In addition, planning is under way for Statistics Canada to co-ordinate an Aboriginal Peoples' Survey after the 2001 Census. This survey would offer an integrated approach to collecting information relevant to the needs of Aboriginal people and other levels of government.

**Reducing the Administrative Burden for Métis and Off-Reserve Groups**

Although the principles described above can be applied generally, the government has also looked specifically at the unique requirements of Métis and off-reserve Aboriginal groups. The government will seek to create multi-year funding arrangements with these groups and to harmonize federal fiscal reporting requirements across federal departments wherever possible, while maintaining the principle of accountability. These initiatives will contribute to creating a more stable and predictable environment for Métis and off-reserve Aboriginal groups, and should lessen the administrative burden that they face.



**IV: Supporting Strong Communities, People and Economies**

Supporting healthy, sustainable Aboriginal communities means finding new ways to empower individuals and their communities. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples spoke of a circle of well-being in which self-government, economic self-reliance, healing and a partnership of mutual respect are the key building blocks.

Well-being is measured by the presence of certain factors that are important to all Canadians. These include the physical environment, such as adequate housing and clean water; access to education and training opportunities; the opportunity to participate in the economy and earn a meaningful livelihood; and access to the health, social and cultural supports needed to ensure that people can remain healthy.

These factors also speak to the importance of building capacity for both individuals and communities. As self-government becomes a reality, Aboriginal communities will require increasingly sophisticated policy and program skills and administrative structures to support good governance. Wherever they live, Aboriginal people will want equitable access to culturally relevant programs and services to help improve their own quality of life.

Previous federal initiatives have provided a measure of progress, but persistent gaps remain between most Aboriginal people's quality of life and that enjoyed by most other Canadians. It has become increasingly important to focus on some of the key factors that contribute to the circle of well-being for Aboriginal people and their communities. This translates into a concentrated framework for action, to be pursued with Aboriginal people and other partners, in three key areas:

- Improving health and public safety
- Investing in people
- Strengthening economic development

**Improving Health and Public Safety**

According to every health and social indicator, Aboriginal people lag behind other Canadians. This is a situation we are committed to working in partnership to change.

Aboriginal people represent the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. Population growth for Status Indians is expected to be 2.7 percent on reserves and 2.8 percent off reserves over the period from 1996 to 2000. Between 1991 and 2000, the Métis and off-reserve population is projected to increase by 18 percent.

With approximately 50 percent of the total Aboriginal population under the age of 25, including almost 60 percent of the Status Indian population, demands for infrastructure, education and economic-development opportunities are increasing very rapidly. The Government of Canada is committed to working in partnership to address the needs that this population growth will create, and to improve living conditions in Aboriginal communities.

**Improving Community Infrastructure**

One of the most important elements of people's sense of well-being is access to good quality housing. Fifty percent of dwellings on First Nations reserves require renovations or replacement. The government's new on-reserve housing policy, introduced in 1996, establishes a solid framework incorporating the required structural reforms within which sustainable improvements are being achieved.

The new policy provides First Nations with greater control while strengthening accountability. The development of community-based housing programs and multi-year plans provides First Nations with the flexibility to accommodate the diverse housing needs within their communities. The policy encourages communities to build links between housing and community economic development, job creation and skills enhancement, as well as promoting partnering with the private sector and more private investment on reserves.

One example of how the new policy works is in a First Nation community in Ontario, where the First Nation has developed a series of housing programs to meet the various needs of its residents, including rental units for starter homes and low-income earners, as well as home ownership opportunities. The First Nation recently won an award from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) for its construction of five houses designed for independent living for seniors.

The government recognizes housing as a priority area and plans to make increased investments, in combination with existing resources, to accelerate the implementation of the new on-reserve housing policy by First Nations.

First Nations continue to access CMHC's Non-Profit Housing Program which provides annual housing subsidies for social housing. CMHC's Residential Rehabilitation Assistance and Shelter Enhancement programs are also available to First Nations. The latter initiative contributes to providing safe shelter for victims of family violence.

The federal government will continue to support off-reserve Aboriginal housing through CMHC's annual housing subsidies on the existing social housing portfolio. In addition, off-reserve Aboriginal households or organizations benefit from CMHC's Residential Rehabilitation Assistance, Home Adaptations for Seniors Independence and Shelter Enhancement programs.

CMHC also continues to work with Aboriginal and other interested parties to facilitate access to the private housing market for Aboriginal households. Under a CMHC/Aboriginal Capital Corporation pilot project launched in 1996, All Nations Trust Company acts as CMHC's agent for financing or re-financing of Aboriginal housing projects under the On-Reserve and Urban Native Housing programs.

Clean water is a basic necessity for ensuring good health. In 1995, a joint DIAND/Health Canada survey found that 211 community water-treatment systems and 64 community sewage-treatment facilities in First Nations communities posed significant health and safety risks and required upgrading. The federal government has responded by re-allocating resources to address these basic needs for community infrastructure. To date, remedial work has been undertaken on more than three quarters of the problem systems.

Since 1987, the proportion of houses on reserves with water service has risen from 74 to 96 percent and those with sewer facilities from 67 to 92 percent. However, a significant backlog still exists, and more water and sewer facilities are needed to keep pace with the expected growth in new housing. Addressing health and safety issues remains a government priority and the government will continue to allocate additional resources with a view to addressing water and sewer needs in First Nations communities.

**Healthy Communities**

Major community health programs include nursing, community health representatives, a National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program, and a program for children's health, called Brighter Futures. The Building Healthy Communities Strategy was announced in 1994. The strategy sets out a two-pronged approach: a transfer strategy to facilitate community control of health resources, and a program strategy to address priority service gaps in mental health, solvent abuse and home-care nursing.

Health programs are being devolved to First Nations so they can be controlled and delivered at the community level. By late 1997, some 30 percent of First Nations had signed a health transfer agreement and 12 percent an integrated agreement. Almost a third of the remaining First Nations communities are involved in pre-transfer planning.

Training of Aboriginal health professionals is an important part of enhancing capacity in improving Aboriginal health. The current Indian and Inuit Health Careers Program contributes to this training. Further work will be done with all parties involved in Aboriginal education to ensure health careers remain a priority.

Of increasing national concern is diabetes, a disease which is three times as common among Aboriginal people as among other Canadians. The government will work to ensure a greater focus on prevention, care and research related to diabetes in Aboriginal communities.

**An Aboriginal Health Institute**

Better knowledge and understanding are needed about how best to address health and social problems among the Aboriginal population. By building upon existing capacities and programs, Aboriginal people themselves will identify the strategies that will work for them. One way in which this can be achieved is through the creation of an Aboriginal Health Institute which will benefit Aboriginal people both on and off reserves. This institute could, for example, conduct health research focused on the needs of Aboriginal people, gather and disseminate information on culturally appropriate medicines and treatments, support basic and advanced training of Aboriginal health workers, and serve as a support system for health workers in Aboriginal communities.

**Improving Public Safety**

The federal government is also committed to enhancing the safety and security of First Nations by providing them with access to police services that are professional, effective, culturally appropriate and accountable to the communities they serve. Under the First Nations Policing Policy, introduced in 1991, the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, and First Nations work together to negotiate tripartite agreements for police services that meet the particular needs of each community. The cost of the police services is shared by the federal government (52 percent) and the relevant provincial or territorial government (48 percent). There are more than 100 policing agreements serving 290 First Nation communities.

Building on the success of this policy, the government will provide additional resources to expand First Nations police services. It will work with First Nations to ensure a focus on crime prevention, particularly for vulnerable groups, such as children, women and youth.

**Investing in People**

Investing in people means assisting individuals to acquire the education, skills and training necessary for individual self-reliance. The government will work in partnership with Aboriginal people to support individual, family and community well-being.

**Better Beginnings for Children**

An investment in Aboriginal people begins with an investment in children. Healthy lives start with healthy beginnings. By continuing the off-reserve Aboriginal Head Start Program and extending it to include on-reserve communities, the government will work with Aboriginal people to address the early childhood development needs of Aboriginal children. As well, the First Nations and Inuit Child Care Program that was developed in the last mandate will be continued.

The government is also committed to working with First Nations to ensure that their children, like other Canadian children, will benefit from the National Child Benefit system when it is introduced nationally in July of 1998. An increased federal child benefit will be provided to low-income families in First Nations communities. Welfare savings that may accrue from these changes on reserves will be available for re-investment in First Nation communities to help alleviate the depth and consequences of child poverty and to support welfare reform.

**Youth Strategy and Education**

Too many Aboriginal youth do not complete high school. They leave the school system without the necessary skills for employment, and without the language and cultural knowledge of their people. The federal government recognizes that a strong future for Aboriginal people depends on providing a better future for Aboriginal youth.

Working with First Nations, the government will support education reform on reserves. The objective will be to improve the quality and cultural relevance of education for First Nations students; improve the classroom effectiveness of teachers; support community and parental involvement in schools; improve the management and support capacity of First Nations systems; and enhance learning by providing greater access to technology for First Nations schools. One example of the successful use of technology

is the introduction of Industry Canada's SCHOOLNET and Computers for Schools Initiative into First Nations schools.

By improving the quality of education, the government will work with First Nations to encourage youth to stay in school. These initiatives will focus on increasing high-school graduation rates and ensuring that First Nations youth leave school optimistic about their future.

Through the Youth Employment Strategy launched in 1996, the government is committed to continuing its support for First Nation, Inuit and Métis youth to explore career options while in school and to acquire practical work experience.

In today's economy, self-employment provides a rapidly increasing share of new job creation. The government has expanded its support of young entrepreneurs through activities such as the recently announced Aboriginal Business Youth Initiative, which provides loan funds, mentoring, and business support through Aboriginal financial organizations.

**Multi-Purpose Urban Youth Centres**

To reach urban Aboriginal youth more effectively, the government intends to establish a network of multi-purpose Aboriginal youth centres linked to friendship centres or other Aboriginal community organizations. These centres will focus on encouraging youth to stay in school to complete their education. The programs to be provided will include career planning, employment opportunities, and recreational activity in a supportive, culturally relevant environment.

**Reforming Welfare**

The government proposes to work with First Nations to reform social assistance programs on reserves, to increase personal independence and to improve employment prospects for First Nation workers. The goal of this initiative will be to support First Nations in their efforts to re-orient their welfare systems away from passive income maintenance toward active measures. A central focus of this initiative will be linking the welfare system with work and training opportunities within the community. One priority will be to support the development of their management and administrative capacity to implement an active case-managed system, and to further strengthen data and information systems.

**Training and Skills Development**

The government will also work with Aboriginal partners to implement a five-year Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy which will extend the current Aboriginal labour market agreements when they expire in 1999. The objective of this strategy is to provide Aboriginal groups with a number of tools to increase employment. The strategy will serve Aboriginal people on reserves and off reserves, and will feature a results-based system of accountability using jobs and increased self-reliance as measures of achievement. Success in meeting the human resources challenge faced by Aboriginal people is based on creating a broad-based partnership involving Aboriginal groups, governments, the private sector and relevant institutions.

As part of the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy, the government will work with its partners to establish a private sector-driven Aboriginal Human Resources Development Council. This Council will bring business, labour, academic and Aboriginal experts together to focus on addressing the human resources challenge and to encourage the private sector to share responsibility for improving Aboriginal access to the labour market. A special focus on urban Aboriginal people and on Aboriginal children and youth will be part of the strategy's efforts to improve well-being.

Aboriginal groups and organizations will continue to be integral to human resources development. The government will seek their views on the best way to implement the strategy and the proposed council. We are also working in partnership to develop best practices and forecasts on labour-force training requirements and job opportunities.

**Strengthening Economic Development**

Jobs and wealth creation are the underpinnings of prosperous, self-reliant Aboriginal communities and of meaningful self-government. The transition to self-reliance is difficult, as many Aboriginal communities have limited economic opportunity and capacity. They experience major difficulties in accessing the tools to build economic self-reliance: investment capital, markets for their products and services, suitable work experience, access to lands and resources, and innovation in the workplace.

The government will work in partnership with Aboriginal leaders, business people and communities, the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board, the private sector, the provinces and territories, and the voluntary sector to expand opportunities for economic development and reduce obstacles. As part of this approach, the government will participate in sectoral, national and regional economic development forums to help identify priorities and shape new initiatives. One such forum, the Joint Economic Development Initiative in New Brunswick, was launched in 1996.

**Access to Capital**

Access to debt and equity capital is a major issue for Aboriginal business and community development. The government supported the launch of a National Aboriginal Financing Task Force in 1995 and is working with its recently tabled conclusions and recommendations for greater access to investment capital. In particular, the government, Aboriginal leaders, and the financial services sector are working together to expand the availability of commercial loan instruments and services for Aboriginal businesses and communities. Working with institutions such as the Aboriginal Capital Corporations, Community Futures Development Corporations and the Business Development Bank of Canada, we are also exploring ways to provide development capital that is not available from commercial sources. As well, the government has signalled its willingness to discuss the idea of extending tax credits to investors in Aboriginal venture capital corporations.

The government is also seeking to increase business equity funding for First Nations enterprises by expanding its Opportunity Fund. This fund invests in small First Nations businesses, such as a wood manufacturing facility in Alberta, which is expected to employ 25 to 30 band members and generate $1.6 million in annual sales.

**Increased Market Access**

Market access is another area for partnership. The majority of the 20,000 Aboriginal businesses in Canada are small and serve local and regional markets. A concerted effort is needed from industry and governments at all levels to work with Aboriginal businesses to open up existing and emerging market opportunities through mentoring, joint venturing and supplier development.

The government is making progress in opening up procurement markets. Under its Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business, 39 federal departments and agencies have adopted specific objectives and have awarded contracts to Aboriginal businesses worth more than $50 million in 1997 alone. The government will seek to engage the private sector, the provinces and municipalities in joint initiatives and in sharing best practices to increase Aboriginal business success in these procurement markets. Concerted efforts will also be made to develop opportunities with international agencies such as the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Latin America Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean.

The government is also working to open export markets for Aboriginal businesses led by Aboriginal women and men and to improve their ability to supply these markets. Trade missions to Europe and the United States have been used to showcase Aboriginal products. Aboriginal firms are also participating in the Prime Minister's January 1998 Team Canada mission to Latin America.

Aboriginal Business Canada has made export market development a priority. Work is just beginning on a new three-year strategy to improve market access and export readiness which will assist Canadian Aboriginal businesses to develop markets abroad. For instance, support has been provided to the

Meadow Lake Tribal Council to establish a joint venture with the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua to develop forest concessions and tourism opportunities.

Aboriginal business leaders, federal and provincial officials, and the Canadian Tourism Commission recently agreed to create an Aboriginal Tourism Team Canada to promote tourism opportunities. The federal government will participate in the development of international marketing strategies for Aboriginal tourism, including a system of standards, quality control, and measures to ensure that tourism developments are environmentally sound. These activities have enormous potential, especially for many remote communities.

**Increased Access to Lands and Resources**

For many First Nations, land and natural resources offer the most important opportunity for creating jobs and economic development. The government will work with First Nations, provinces and territories to strengthen the co-management process, and to provide increased access to land and resources. The government will also work to accelerate Aboriginal participation in resource-based development in and around Aboriginal communities, and to improve the benefits that communities receive from these developments. The government also re-affirms its commitment to the claims process, which provides First Nations people with increased access to lands and resources.

The government will increase funding for resource initiatives so First Nations communities can derive more benefits from resource development projects, the co-management of resources, and harvesting and contracting opportunities related to resources.

A new strategy is also being developed to build capacity for lands and resource management in First Nations communities. The government is working with First Nations to help them develop the needed skills to prepare for the transfer of oil-and-gas management and control. It will also co-partner innovative initiatives to develop the traditional Aboriginal activities of wild-food harvesting and fur trading on a competitive and sustainable basis.

The government is contributing to a number of Aboriginal-industry-government co-operation initiatives and intends to expand these activities. Those already under way include the BHP diamond development initiative in the Northwest Territories; an initiative for economic development in northern Ontario; a joint process for resource co-management in Saskatchewan; and resource-management bodies based on comprehensive claims settlements in the North.

The federal Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy and ongoing treaty negotiations are important mechanisms for increasing Aboriginal people's access to commercial fishing opportunities. For example, the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy has led to 239 commercial fishing licences being retired and issued to First Nations communities and Aboriginal organizations since 1992. New funds will now be provided to accelerate Aboriginal participation in coastal fisheries.

**Innovation**

The adoption of innovative processes of production and the development of new products are crucial for the survival of Aboriginal businesses, and for creating more jobs and wealth in Aboriginal communities. The government is working to ensure that its programs support the innovation needs of Aboriginal businesses. Aboriginal Business Canada has identified support of innovation as one of its four strategic priorities for business development funding. The government will improve access to the information highway, help develop electronic business tools that address Aboriginal business needs, and support Aboriginal firms in the development of new products and services.

The government will also be supporting initiatives for innovation in the natural resources sector, and a network for innovation in Aboriginal economic development. This network will facilitate the sharing of best practices and innovative approaches to Aboriginal economic development among governments, the private sector, and Aboriginal communities and businesses.

## Northern Initiatives

Considerable progress has been made in the northern territories in creating partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Progress has been made in the settlement of many land claims and self-government agreements. The new territory of Nunavut will change the map of Canada. The challenge for the North is to continue to develop new governance institutions which are sensitive to Aboriginal interests, and to the shared interests of all people in Canada, while working to strengthen the North's economic base.

### A Unique Environment

For a number of reasons, the environment for Aboriginal policy in the North is very different than in southern Canada. The North has few reserves and the proportion of Aboriginal people in the northern population is extremely high -- 85 percent in Nunavut, 28 percent in the Yukon, and close to 50 percent in the western Northwest Territories. Although the overall population is small, the total land mass comprises over 40 percent of Canada. Through a formula financing agreement with the federal government, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) delivers a range of social and community programs to people in the North, including Aboriginal people, that, in the south, are funded by Canada for First Nation delivery on reserves, and by provinces for all people off reserves. These programs and services include housing, community infrastructure, water and sewer services, social services and education. While in the Yukon, the federal government delivers many of these programs and services, the Yukon Government through similar arrangements, delivers some programs such as elementary and secondary education.

A strong foundation for renewed partnership exists with the signing of comprehensive land claims agreements with all Inuit in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and with close to half of the Aboriginal groups in the Yukon and western NWT.

### A Northern Agenda

The Government of Canada is committed to continuing its efforts to advance political and economic development in the existing two, and soon to be three, northern territories. This will be done by building strong partnerships with Aboriginal people throughout the North and encouraging the private sector and territorial governments to play a strong role. With these partners, we will build on what has already been achieved towards the goal of ensuring that strong Aboriginal communities emerge in the North.

The challenge in Nunavut will be to establish an effective, decentralized government by April 1, 1999 in collaboration with the territory's Inuit population, and to achieve the objective of having Inuit fill 50 percent of positions at all levels of Nunavut's public service. The federal government is committed to supporting the establishment of the new territory's government, including a substantial investment in training Inuit to work in its public service.

In the western NWT, the completion of land claims and self-government agreements with Aboriginal groups will remain a priority. The federal government will continue to support the unique dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to define a new constitution for the western NWT. One of the major issues will be to explore how public government in the NWT can accommodate the inherent right of self-government and the self-government aspirations of northern Aboriginal people. A parallel challenge will be to ensure that Aboriginal people and communities share in the wealth and benefits expected to flow from major resource development in the NWT.

In the Yukon, success in settling land claims is leading to new relationships among Canada, the Yukon Territorial Government and Yukon First Nations, and to major changes in the territory's framework for governance. Public boards with Aboriginal participation will be established throughout the territory to manage land and resources. New arrangements are being developed on a tripartite basis to transfer the

delivery of programs and services to First Nations and to devolve provincial-type responsibilities to the Yukon government.

Finally, the action plan for the North includes fostering the circumpolar relationship among Arctic countries. Canada has emerged as a leader in this area, and Aboriginal people are playing a key role. Mary Simon has been appointed as Canada's first Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs. Indigenous peoples, including Inuit, have been granted status as permanent participants in the eight-nation Arctic Council, a body whose agenda includes sustainable development and environmental protection in northern territories around the globe. The federal government plans to demonstrate Canada's commitment to these issues by hosting the first International Circumpolar Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in Whitehorse in 1998. Canada is taking a lead role in the negotiation of international protocols on persistent organic pollutants, which present a particular problem for the northern environment.

**Gathering Strength**

Although the environment for Aboriginal policy in the North is unique, the four basic objectives of Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan provide directions for the future.

**Partnership**

In addition to land claim and self-government agreements, other initiatives to renew the partnership will include a consultation process in all three northern territories to acquaint Aboriginal northerners with the action plan and to ensure follow-up, and a public education plan to build more balanced, realistic and informed perspectives. The federal government is prepared to support further enumeration of Métis in the Northwest Territories, in conjunction with the GNWT. Community healing initiatives intended to address the legacy of abuse at Residential Schools will include the North.

**Governance**

A number of commitments in the Aboriginal Action Plan apply to the North. Aboriginal groups will benefit from the proposed governance resource centre. The proposal to focus on capacity-building in self-government negotiations will also be of benefit. Funding support for Aboriginal women's organizations will apply in the territories, and commemorative initiatives honouring the shared heritage emanating from Treaty 8 and Treaty 11 in the NWT will be discussed with beneficiaries. Resolving the question of "certainty" language in land claims agreements is also important for reaching lasting settlements in the western NWT.

**Fiscal Relationships**

In developing a new fiscal relationship, the Government of Canada will work with Aboriginal people and territorial governments to increase self-sufficiency. As with initiatives in the south, the objective in developing a new fiscal relationship is to provide greater stability and predictability in financing, and to ensure accountability for funding to community members as well as to the governments which provide the funding. In addition, the government will work in partnership with Aboriginal governments and institutions to maximize the generation of own-source revenue.

**Strong Communities, People and Economies**

Many elements in the action plan will be applied to strengthen northern communities and build a stronger economic base for the North. These range from initiatives by Health Canada to prevent diabetes, to support for young people to improve their skills and find jobs through the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy.

The government will work in partnership with Aboriginal leaders and business people, the larger business community, territorial governments and the voluntary sector to expand Aboriginal economic opportunities in the North. The obstacles common to Aboriginal people throughout Canada, such as

access to capital, land and resources, and labour-force experience are being addressed in the North through comprehensive land claims, impact benefits agreements covering major resource development initiatives, resource co-management, support for education, training and youth employment, improved northern access to the information highway and business development support. Major opportunities revolve around natural resources, Aboriginal tourism and eco-tourism, and cultural industries. The North figures prominently in the national Aboriginal Tourism Strategy and efforts to develop export markets for Aboriginal products. The federal government is also supporting innovative initiatives for the natural resource sector, including the traditional economies of fur trapping and wild-food harvesting, which are particularly important in the North. First Nations in the Yukon will be invited to continue working with government in these important areas, including the development of a forestry policy.

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's Sustainable Development Strategy has the potential to be an important tool in the North. It emphasizes community participation in regulatory structures set up by government, some of which arise from land claims settlements and some from the belief that communities will produce more appropriate strategies to meet their needs if they are directly involved. All partners, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, will need to work together to address difficult northern issues such as high unemployment, the demographic pressure of rising populations in Aboriginal communities, and problems in delivering training, health and youth services.

## A Commitment to Meaningful and Lasting Change

We have created this action plan, Gathering Strength, as the start of a new chapter in Canada's relationship with Aboriginal people, a turning of the page in order to focus on a more prosperous and co-operative future.

Canada's approach pledges us to renewing partnerships with Aboriginal people and governments, strengthening governance, creating a flexible yet accountable fiscal framework, and supporting strong communities, people and economies. Our efforts are aimed at targeted, measurable short-term benefits, as well as building for the long term.

We recognize, as did the Royal Commission, that a truly Canadian approach must be multi-dimensional and will have many players. That is why Gathering Strength is designed to provide a comprehensive, flexible framework in which all parties can work together to address the priorities of Aboriginal people. We envision a partnership not just between the federal government and Aboriginal people, men and women, Elders and youth, but one that also includes provincial, territorial and local governments; national, regional and local Aboriginal leaders; the private sector; and other interested groups and organizations. This partnership must extend to include all Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

Clearly, we need to work closely with all our partners to ensure meaningful and lasting change. That is why, in the coming months, we will be working with Aboriginal people, communities and organizations to develop work plans, establish targets and objectives, and monitor the implementation of the various initiatives in this action plan. We will also engage other governments, the private sector and the voluntary sector, in order to implement new solutions and overcome obstacles that have held back action in the past, including the need to secure strong public support.

Tradition and innovation need not be mutually exclusive. We have a rare opportunity to gather strength for a better future. In partnership, we can all succeed.

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